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Gutierrez, Ray Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Ray Gutierrez

(unedited)

Conducted October 23, 1997
by Geoffrey Reynolds

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Ray Gutierrez
October 23, 1997
Interviewer: Geoffrey Reynolds

GR: This is an interview with Ray Gutierrez on October 23, 1997, and the interviewer was Geoffrey Reynolds. We are at 431 Dykema Avenue, Apartment 210, in Holland Michigan. Ray, could you give me your full name and spelling?

RG: Ray Gutierrez.

GR: When were you born?

RG: July 20, 1915.

GR: Were you born in Holland?

RG: No, born in Bama Ray, Texas.

GR: If you were born there, when did you come to Holland?

RG: We came here in 1953.

GR: Tell me a little about your family, children, your wife.

RG: My wife and I were married in Texas. She was originally from Las Cruces, New Mexico. We met in _____ and were married in 1939. When I was in the service I came by this area and I liked it, so I decided when I get back, if I do get back, I'd bring my family over here. So in 1953 we moved over here.

GR: Did you have children at that point?

RG: We had several children already.

GR: And their names?

RG: Well, we had Sally, the oldest one; Ray Jr.; and Jill, and Johnny was about two

months old.

GR: Did you have more children after coming to Holland?

RG: No, wait a minute. By the time we moved here, we also had Gill and Stella. Then after we moved here, that's when Jerry was born here.

GR: Where have you lived in Holland during your life here?

RG: First, when we came here we rented a place from my brother-in-law, Guierro, a house behind an old restaurant on 136th Avenue. And when we moved here, we opened that restaurant. Then I got a job in a factory with Bohn Aluminum, and she was running the restaurant. I had my nights and weekends. We did that for a year and a half. Then, we bought an old house on New Holland Street. We moved there and paid \$50 a month. That was supposed to go in the down payment. He'd take that money--whatever I had paid on the down payment. So a year later, he had that little farm, 40 acre farm, barn and house. So he asked me if we wanted it. We went and looked at it. We liked it. So I bought it. When we moved from Texas, we left a house up there. Then I called my lawyer and he sold the house and sent me the money here and then I paid on the property here. I didn't pay more, but I paid a good chunk of money. We lived there for ten years. I raised pickles for Heinz, I raised turkeys for DeVries, and I raised for beans for Michigan Canning Factory. I raised two truckloads of pigs and I sold them to the auction. And I still work in the factory. I got a better job then at Holland Color and Chemical now it is BASF. And I worked there on some maintenance. Then I worked in the flusher room. They trained us for everything. When they needed change they knew that that person was

qualified. So I went through from the warehouse all the way until OCM, which had the acid and all that kind of stuff. I went through the whole thing. Then I was a flusher operator until I hurt my back. Then I started going to a doctor in a hospital here and there. But they still kept me there for two more years until it got where I could hardly move. Then I got laid off. And instead of going to the hospital, I went to see a lawyer - Gerritt Van Wyk. He was my lawyer and he took the case. After that, he asked me, "You think you can work?" I said I can try. So he and I went to Donnelly Mirror. I applied for a job, and they gave me a job as a shipping clerk. I worked about 3 months, 4 months, something like that. I got so sick. So they sent me to the hospital again. A year later, the doctor said he wanted to operate. I said I would like to go through anything that works so I can get well. But there was nothing in after I got surgery. They removed the disk. They replaced with fiberglass. The doctor told me if your body gets used to the plate and the plate gets used to your body, you'll be okay (laughter). So finally it did. I think it took about around ten years to get well where I can work and everything else. After four years, I started with worker compensation. I had to go through the court. But I finally got compensation for \$90 a week, and I had to stretch it. But thank the good Lord that I started getting better and able to start operating my business too - farming and create some turkeys and chickens and pigs and all that. Then when I got the case settled, I asked my doctor what would be the best thing I could do. He said, "If you went to someplace where it would be warm, maybe your back would be better, healed up." Before that I converted into the wrecking yard which is now Quincy Auto Parts. But

that was the start of the Ray & Sons Auto Parts. So I operated about three years. But then my kids, one was in the service, the other was in college, and the other was too little to work yet. So I decided to sell it. You might not believe it, but I paid \$7,000 for that property - 40 acres and the house and the barn. I could have sold it right away because I had buyers everyday wanted to buy it. I really hated to sell it, but I had no choice. Then Fred Kolean came by, and he had come 2-3 times and wanted to buy. So I said, "Ok, I want to sell it to you." He said, "You will?" I said, "Yes." He said, "How much?" I said, "Well, \$30,000." He took the price right away, I didn't believe it. So I sold it to him and he gave me \$10,000 down payment. Then I moved to Texas and opened a restaurant out there. Before I went there I had to investigate what was the best thing to do. Here, I tried to open a car lot because I had a license here already. But it was required in Texas to be a three years' resident before I can buy a license. I said I was born and raised here (laughter). They said that doesn't count. Anyway, I decided to open a restaurant out there. My father had built it, and I has built it. I moved the family over there, and I opened a restaurant. By that time, there was three guys already married. So I just had the three little ones. Two was in the service, one was married, and the other was working in the factory already. So we moved out there, but that was the worst thing. Everything was okay, but after I moved there, then they started working on the streets. I was right on the highway - the old highway, highway 80. There was a lot of business. But then they put a bypass in. So there goes my business. Some places were there for eleven, fifteen years, and they closed up. So what can I do (laughter)?

After that, I got a job with a Chevrolet garage; I forgot the name right now. I was a car salesman. I worked there one year. The kids were in school. I bought a house, but I still owed for the house. So one day I was thinking when I working in my office, I think I better go back to Michigan. So when to eat I asked my wife, "How would you like to go back to Michigan?" "Well lets go," she said. I said, "Okay, let's find out when school gets out." We couldn't take the kids out of school. In May, we came back. That's when I started with that little restaurant with my brother-in-law. After I got back, the guy knocked the house down. He wouldn't make the payments at the bank, People's Bank (it was People's Bank then). He knocked the house down and started selling soil. So when I came and looked at the property, I just went back to the lawyer and said I want to foreclose a contract on that guy. So I did, foreclosed a contract. Oh, he was so mad. I said, "Well, you know damn well you can't even the boards of the old building, much less knock down the barn and then the house and then sell soil out of it for gardens and stuff like that." So when we were in court, he came with that excuse. The lawyer said, "Wait a minute, where did you make the payment?" He said, "The People's Bank." He said, "Did you ever ask them if they know Mr. Gutierrez?" He said, "No." He [the lawyer] said, "Well they should know what he was doing. Also you know I was his lawyer. How come you didn't ask me?" He said, "I never thought about it." So his lawyer said, "You've got no chance. He's got you over a barrel." So I said, "Whatever you want to do. I just want to enforce the contract." I could have made him pay for the soil. But I didn't want to be that hard on him. With the money I got

from the farm I moved into town. I already had that first house started on East 9th Street. Then I bought another house - a two-family house. Then I started buying two-family houses. I figured one apartment would make the payment and the other we save for repairs and taxes. So I get up to eight two-family houses. I was paying five and six and seven thousand dollars for each house. I had them for six years. I couldn't get hired by anyone because I would sue the company or because of my disability. But when I was feeling better to start working, I called my lawyer and I told him I wanted to talk to someone from the State to cancel that compensation, that I thought I was able to start working. So when they heard that from Lansing, they said, "Are you sure going to?" I said, "I sure am going to try. I'm not sure I'm going to make it, but I am sure I am going to try." But I also said I wanted to leave the door open in case I can't go through with it and I have to go back to my compensation." They said in that case you can. So I said okay. But instead of that, I found out that a lot of people had so many problems with _____ and all this stuff. I hadn't figured out if that had happened to me either. I love my voice. I can't sound because I had a lung cancer surgery. I can hardly talk my own language, much less english. But anyway, I thought I could do something for the people. I see the people coming with the big groups, picking blueberries, cherries, and work on the farm. They have their children out there all day. They looked like little pigs and so forth. So I had a lot of friends in town. I went to Mr. Ihrman, he was the superintendent of the schools. I suggested, "You know, I want to start something to help these people." He said, "Like what?" I said, "Well, these people need

education. And we should give someplace to stay for the people working. They can't have those kids growing up in all that dust and all that fertilizer stuff they drop on the trees." He said, "You know, you have a good point right there." I said, "I want to start with the adult education, but I need a room. I need a teacher. And the rest, I'll take care of that." I said, "I need some books." He said, "We can work out things with you. You can use the one room at the Washington School and the start the first class right there." So I started to work with the people and I invited them to come to the classes. By the time I was ready to start, which was July 25, 1964, I had 25 students to start up with. He got me Mrs. ----, I forgot the name but she was an old retired teacher. She barely could move, but she could teach (laughter). You know, when people come in town, the first they do was look for me, because they heard that I was starting that program. So this Cuban women, Fernandez, she came over and said, "What can you do for me?" I said, "Well what do you need? If you need money, I don't have it. (chuckle) I don't have an education, but I can use the education of these people. She said, "How about if I teach for you?" I said, "I can't pay you." But I'm in the process to get this program going and maybe we get partners for the federal government. She said, "Okay, I'll go ahead and teach for you." So then, I had two teachers. I had one _____, I don't know if you still have them - I think they call them Visa. They get some volunteers and take them to other States and working with the people. Then Mr. Ihrman got two of those girls to help me. They were also volunteer. So we got that started. Then, I was thinking about how I could start the day care center. So I started looking for a building. I

couldn't find any building. So I went to Grand Haven. And I went visit Wilson, she was the director of the Salvation Army. I told her what I was thinking about starting. She said, "There is a building out here by the...they call it waterfront, but the people call it swamp (laughter). It is an old building - the old Clark School. They provided me with a bunch of women to clean it up real cheap. By that time, we already had some tables and chairs and old seats for the children. So we painted. Then when we were ready to get the children, I had to no choice but to get my wife and Abraham (he was a police officer). I got him and he was in my classes. And I got Joe Puentes and the police officer. So my wife and his wife worked with the children. They teach them what they can, they feed them, and clean it up. We had a lot of problems with children, you know. By that time, the Father was an assistant Priest there, Murphy. He found out and he said, "You know what, they got a program in Benton Harbor. They started this same thing, very identical to what you're starting. How about we invite people to come here and we see what we can do?" I said, "Go ahead and invite them." So these two guys named Bishel and Wayne Druth came over and we sit down. They said, "You know, this is the same thing that we started up. And we already got money from the federal government." I said, "What? Give me some." (laughs) They said, "Okay, how about you let us go around with you a couple times and see what you got started." So we started with the classes that same night. He said, "That's good. How about that day care center you got out there?" I said, "It's not too much, but I hope we can get something better than that." The next day, they went out there and we had 26 kids. And they took a note and said, "We

are going to have to start it on Lansing." I said, "Uh-oh. That's where the whole thing is going downstairs (laughter)." But you know, I thought about the Health Department. The first thing they are going to find is where I had those kids. And they did too. About three days later, an old lady, a colored woman, she was looking for Ray Gutierrez. So they told her where I was. She said, "Mr Gutierrez, I would like to have a meeting with you." She came over to my house and we had a meeting. She said, "I was sure you that had started a day care center here." I said, "Yes, Yes." She said, "How did you start it?" I told her. I said, "You might not believe it, but I started it this way." She said, "Yes, you but you forgot something, what you should have started." I said, "What's with me?" I said, "Well that's something else. Who are you?" She said, "I am the Health Department in Lansing. And I have got the proof, the bills, and everything for you to get the children there." I said, "Well, I had no time, no choice. I'm sorry." She said, "Well let's go and take a look at it." She went and said, "Everything is okay." But she said we had one restroom where the children went. We had two restrooms, but we can't work on the other one, so we restrict the one we can fix and we let the kids use the same restroom. And what I did that she really thought about was I locked that door. She said, "You did the right thing so they cannot get in there. You know what, I am going to start work with you and we are going to have started something." Well I tell you, in a about a month, we had the first money from the government. And then when I start this day care center at Hope Church. I went to Hope College and then I got a _____ from Mrs....what was her name...anyway, she was the director of the migrant program.

She would help with the kids from Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Anyway, Mrs. Hyssop said, "I would be more than glad to work with you." Then she got some more women. And we started to work on the Day Care Center at Hope. The first check was \$12,000 from the government. Then I got \$22,000 for equipment (seats and little beds). And then they went to work on the church. They started working on the side of the wall. They were building a little table all the way around so the kids can work on them or use them for a table. And they had more bathrooms next to the big bathroom, for the children. So they come up with a darn good program. Then I got some commodities from the government, from the state. They give us a can of beans and corn flour, and you name it, got to have it. The kids don't eat a can of beans. They scoop some for them, and we use them for the kids to do some homework with tape and glue and draw something with beans. Then I started another class in Van Buren High School - adult education classes. I ended up with \$25,000 the third year for a _____ program. I paid the people \$2 an hour for attending classes, two hours a night every night. So that made them more ambitious to come to the classes. Some people really want to learn. Some people never learn. I have to expel them from the classes (laughter). They don't try. I said, "Look here. I went through all this thing here. You don't know what I went through. And now I get money and you guys just want to get the money and forget about what is right behind you. The time will come when you will really going to need to know anything you learned in school." So we went through for 10, 11 years, then I retired, resigned. They started opening programs all over Michigan. They had an office in Detroit,

Lansing, Saginaw, and they had one in Grand Rapids (I was running that office there). Then I had an office in Holland, one in Grand Haven, one in Fennville. I had an assistant in each office. I started working in school with the high school program - high school kids. We would take those high school kids and use them for social workers and train them how to do business. Then we would refer them to Central Michigan University, Michigan State University, Western Michigan University. We provided them with some money for tuition. So now you want to talk about Holland, I guess (laughter).

GR: That was quite good Ray. Thanks for going into depth on that. I think that's important. What organizations have you been involved in?

RG: Michigan Migrant Opportunity Incorporated.

GR: That's the only one?

RG: Yes.

GR: Any churches?

RG: Oh yes. I was in conjunction with the working _____ In other words, I wouldn't get anywhere. See, two years later at Hope, I had a meeting with a church ladies' club - each church from the same organization. They took over the day care center. I left all the furniture that we had and everything. So they started operating with the church money for the first year. Then the second year that got financial aid from the state. Now it's a federal program again; so they got everything from the whole state of Michigan. We had an office in Kalamazoo. The guy in Ann Arbor was the first guy. He had a heart attack. Then the one in Saginaw had a heart

attack. Then one in Detroit had a heart attack. And then I had a lady working in Grand Haven and she died of a heart attack. So I said, I am going to quit before I get hit! So I did.

GR: What are some of the biggest changes you have seen in Holland since your arrival in 1953?

RG: Oh, my gosh. When we moved here it was only 8th Street, the center I mean. Ninth Street had no business at all. Well, there was the big building there which is the Army Reserve now. There was a few stores, a few fueling stations. But I can count. There was one on River, and one south of River, and one north of River. Then a few more stores started opening up. But even before that, on Sundays if you wanted to have a picnic or cook or something, you could have nothing. You can, but you cannot go and buy anything on Sunday. All stores close. If you don't have enough gas in your car it will be in the parking lot until Monday. It was kind of hard because people weren't free to open up on Sundays. I don't really remember when was that resolution that they decided to open just one or two stores on Sunday, until Meijer moves in. They took it to court and they won. And that's when it started. Meijer opened seven days a week. Then a few more stores started, fueling stations, and everything. So now most everything is open on Sunday. But when we moved here there was about 16 or 17 Spanish families. There was more than that, you know, but they were working at nurseries like Zelenkas and Walters and...another nursery. There was also one in Allegan, between here and Allegan. This is where the people were, all those farms, pickle farms. There were a lot of pickle farms

there. They have some houses, because that's where the people stay at. But there were not too many people here in town. After that, the people started moving in. And they started buying their own houses. So there has been a lot of change. It's like you built a new town here. But it was one of the most quiet towns in the state of Michigan until the kids started going wild. Now I think it is the worst one (laughter). But we are happy with it, and we still like Holland. When I was going to convert that farm into the wrecking yard, I had a meeting with the Holland Township Board. Before that, I come out of there on my snow plow, like I said I had a snow plow. And when I was on my way to the contract, I see those guys out there stuck in the driveway. I stopped, pulled them out, cleaned the driveway and took off. They said, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute." So I pulled two or three guys before I got to the place I was going. And the same way the other way, the other direction. Then I had a tractor I ordered from Texas, the one I was farming with. But I wasn't using it. But I had spray, like for potatoes or pickles, with one 55 gallon barrel on back. And then made the connection and sprayed. So I went out there and said, "Why don't you go and pick up my tractor (it's in the barn), and use it." And some said they don't want to do it. So I just sent one of my kids and they go out there and spray that guy's potatoes and pickles and so forth. But honest to God, I never thought about going into business, and that I would need them. I thought they would need me, but I didn't know I was going to need them. So I had a meeting with the board. They said, "First thing we are going to do, we are going to have a petition for you. You are going to have to go two square miles, and if you get everyone to sign for you to

start this business, then you're in business. To tell you the truth you are not the first one going to try this." But I wanted to take a chance. I knew I had a good friendship with everybody, but I never thought about what I was doing for them. So when I went to the first one, he said, "By gosh, Ray, we don't appreciate that kind of business here." The first thing they said was, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I am going to have a lot of old cars. But I am going to do the same thing they do. Anyplace they have a wrecking yard, I am going to build a fence, 8 foot fence. And I want to fence the whole forty acres just to start the business." Well, I got the first one to sign then and went along my way and explained what I was going to do. When I when back there he said, "Well, how you come out?" He said, "Well there it is. And he did it all." Just one guy didn't sign it because he started a wrecking yard without going through the board. He had a bunch of old cars and they made him move every damn thing. So he was mad. And was a good friend of mine. He said, "No I am not going to do it." I said, "Oh, okay. If you don't want to." So when I showed them the petition they looked and said, "You got one person there you don't have." I said, "Yes." They said, "Oh, then it don't go up if he don't want it." (I said, "Will you make him move everything, I would, from there?") He said, "I don't know what you're doing, but by God you got everyone put down here." He said, "What did you do for the people?" I said, "Nothing. We're just friends that's all. I promised them that I would put up a fence where I want to have the business, maybe five or six acres and I'll put a fence around it." He said, "Okay, you're in business. When do you want your license?" I said, "I prefer to have it as soon as you can

because when someone sees me building a fence out there they are going to ask what me what the heck are you going to do out there." So the first thing, I went and bought the longer posts and I hired three guys to help me, and we started building the fence.

GR: What are some qualities that seem to stand out concerning the city of Holland? What do you like about the town?

RG: To tell you the truth, I like everything. Everything except the way the kids are turning out now - it's kind of rough. But as a matter of fact, I feel sorry for a lot of these images. We don't have any young kids around anymore, but we still got a lot of grandkids. I hope they turn out to be that way too. I feel sorry for the parents and at the same time for the kids. A lot of the times I wish I could do something. See I was also family council when I worked for the government, I still could, but see, the way I feel now, I can't do too much at all, or run around because sometimes I start coughing and I really go bad. I wish I could do something with these kids. I'm sure

that I could if I had a chance to go and talk to them and get involved. I was the manager for the softball team for the Boy Scouts for three years. I tell you I had such a nice time with them kids. Anybody can do it if you've got patience. You can talk to them kids and do a lot of change. You may not change everybody, but you can help a lot. The way a lot of families do, they say, "Get out of here and don't come back!" or "Come back whenever you can...". Well that's a means to just push that kid over the cliff. That's the way I feel. You have to bring the kids closer to

you instead of pushing them away. A lot of times the kids will listen better to somebody else than to their own parents. They work together better with somebody else. So, that's one of the things that I really hate to see the whole town go like that. A lot of people feel if they don't have any kids, or they don't have any kids yet, they see those kids out there on the street, they say, "Oh those good for nothing kids." But you can't always blame the kids. A lot of times the parents are to blame, but we never admit it.

GR: Has there ever been a controversy in Holland that you remember?

RG: No.

GR: Concerning Hope College, has it changed in your eyes over the years?

RG: Yes, definitely. Not from good to bad, but from bad to good, because they got so many programs now, they got so many kids involved, and people. Even the churches, they got so involved, they got so close. It's something that I like, like CASA now. I'm a Catholic. Our church burned down. The same day, the church still was burning, and the lady comes across the street, and I was standing right there, and she said, "That's so bad." She said, "Well, what are you people going to do for services?" I said, I don't know, it's up to the priest." She said, "Well you tell your priest to come out and meet with us, we're from the Third Reformed Church. I told Father Steve, and before you know, the next Sunday we had Mass at Hope College in Dimnent, and the Third Reformed Church. We even had it at the Hope Church, and it's been so nice. Then what the Father, the Priest, decided to ask the people at the church if it would be all right if they go through a second collection, to help the

Reformed Church and the Dimnent Church for use of the building. So we've been doing that since it started. We have so much, thanks to the Lord and the people, so much cooperation from all the churches. Way back, people from one church, they couldn't see another. Sometimes I come and I see some people come over here from their church, they go _____. No, that's one thing...people get so close, here in Holland. Ever since we've been here, I have no complaining. A lot of people say, "Oh, the Dutch" or "Oh, the Mexicans" or "Oh, the Spanish." It's not the people, it's the way they try to get along with people. We do not want to take the blame for it, we always want to blame someone else.

GR: Concerning the industry in Holland, how did the public react to the changing of Holland, to becoming a more industrial city in the fifties and sixties when you were here?

RG: I would say at least seventy percent, in everything, not just industrial. Farming was the only thing that went down. But the businesses, I can see a progression every day. I see a lot of businesses like the General Electric branch went out of business. But I don't think they went out of business, they just went to improve, a little jump. Because I was a security guard, as a matter of fact, I was the placement officer. I place one officer after another. I was a sergeant. General Electric was doing pretty good. I never saw that they were short on hand or employment. I never saw that they would say we're going to close one day because of not enough business. The only thing that I can understand is that they had a better deal someplace else. In other words, I think that they would still be in business if they would have stayed

here. You take all these new factories that moved in, they work it out so one moves out and the other moves in right next to it, in the same building or right next to them. So, my son, he started a shipping industry. They call them packages. He started that in 1992. He and this guy, they went together, they were in college together. My son was a motorcycle rider, a racer, and he got hurt. All the time he was hurt, he went back to college. Then he got well, and he went to work for BASF, which is used to be where I worked. He worked two years, I think, and I had the letter that the company wrote and put it on the bulletin board, to let everybody know that he was the production supervisor. He was the production supervisor for that year. Then one Tulip Festival, it was a Friday evening, he went back to the office after supper to catch up with paperwork. On they way out, there was a truck coming in and he went across the road. He was driving a Blazer with great big tires, and that guy was driving a small car and he had three kids with him. That little car went right under it and knocked the wheel off the Blazer. My son got hung from the steering wheel. He had one of the chrome stick on his forehead. They had to use the jaws to pull him out of there. We thought he was never going to make it. He did make it, but we never did find out what happened to the other guy or to the kids. My son, when he came to, because he was in a coma for two or three days, he started saying, "Where's the kids, what happened to the kids?" Then after he got well, he said, "I saw those kids just bouncing," he said, "and I feel so sorry for those kids." We don't know if any of those kids got killed. We never did find out. He was in the hospital for three years. They had to cut his leg off, remove it, put a new lens on the sides, and put

him back together. It was about three years before he started walking again. But he went back to college. He was already through the B.A., and he got a masters degree by the time he got well. So when he got back, he got a settlement. I think it was \$150,000, or something like that. Then his friend was in that kind of business already, in the same building that Target is now, but it was so small. That guy was just about running out of his money. He asked my son if he'd like to go in with him. He did, put the money in, and then after that he found out that guy was _____, and not only that, but he owed five years lease toward the building. After he and my son got into it with him, I started going there and giving them a hand. I remember the first we got crating, we built a crate for a recliner. After we had it wrapped up and everything else, we tried to take it out, and we couldn't take it out because the door was too small. So, we had to crate it again. I told my son, if you are going to do that, then you better find someplace else. He said, "Well, I'll start looking for a building." So, he moved to Zeeland, where Howard Miller used to be. We moved their place in there, and he started doing a lot of crating there and making boxes and all that. After that, we moved to James, where he is now. He rented part of that building. Last year, he took the whole building. Now he put another store in Grand Rapids, the other store was there. Now he operates two stores. Also, it's going real nice. He was worked very hard, and he had hired just one man. He hired one other, our granddaughter, his niece, for the manager of that store out there. He's got his daughter as the manager of this store. He's the president of both stores. He's got this guy to help him with the crating and stuff like that. I can't because of the dust,

but I try to do whatever I can for him. So, there's a lot of businesses starting over here that I see that are doing pretty good. The only people that move, it's not that they're going out of business, they're going where they can get more space, or a better area - a lot of people look for a better area.

GR: What do you think of the increasing diversification of the Holland community? The different ethnic groups that have come to town?

RG: Oh, they've got so many different groups! But it's like I say, when we moved out here, there wasn't any place for groups to go except the Salvation Army and Hope College (laughter). But then the churches started cooperating with us. They came over and said, "We've got some furniture you can use, and if you need any plow." The school board had an old plow. But before that, I had a contract with the school board. I _____ for the schools. But when I went into business, without any hope, I continued to do some plowing, but not too much because I was doing the other business. Like for instance, the school - classes have to be open in time, the day care center has to be open before the people come in. Then I started a Head Start over in Pearl-Mathis school out there. I tell you, we had more kids there than we could handle, but we were the only Head Start. Then we started one in a town just past Muskegon, where all the farms are. We started another Head Start there. We got all the kids there. We started classes at Grant, at the community center. We started another class in Shelby, and we started another class in Grand Rapids. In Grand Rapids we had a big space at what used to be the high school, I forgot the name. See that was the complex program there, black people. Then I went to work with

them. They provided me with a building. A space for my office, my secretary's office, and two rooms for the classrooms. So I had two classrooms, and I had my own office there. I used one of the classrooms for meetings and stuff with my boys, because I had so many students that come from different high schools. The black people really cooperated with us. I had classes there, and I also had classes on Grand Rapid's west side, way out there by Stockton Road. Out there, there weren't too many black people, but almost all Polish people.

GR: How do you feel the Dutch heritage plays into the community today?

RG: The same as the others. I think they just work with the other people and the other nationalities. I think they're really trying to help, and of course, at the same time to be helped just like the others. You cannot be helped if you don't help the other people.

GR: Concentrating on Holland, how do you think the role of women has changed in the past fifty years?

RG: That's a good question. Well, I can even say that they are even changing in the way that they are dressing, and the way they're acting. The best thing they did change is to work like a man. Even they fight for the right to go in the service. But that was not just in the Holland women, but they are in the same group. In other words, I do not see anything wrong for the ladies work. I think you noticed and everybody noticed, since the women start changing, the kids start changing too. A babysitter cannot take care of kid like a real mother. Some babysitters are too rough on the kids, the kids are raised that way, being rough. Some of those babysitters are not

rough enough, and the kids do whatever they want to. So, there are so many changes. It's hard to explain how I feel, but they do good and bad, in other words.

GR: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like after World War II, for you it would have been Vietnam or Korea, in Holland. What was the town like after those wars?

RG: You mean compare those?

GR: Was there a change occurring because of the war?

RG: Well, I don't know how Holland used to be before the war because I went to serve in Texas. The thing that is being changed, in a different way, is the one thing that I am not in favor - we should help the other people sure, but I think we overdo it. I think you notice, even here in Holland, and I don't what the Mayor, this particular one's nationality, but since the people started moving from different classes and different nationalities, that's when Holland went wild too, all this killing and all these people that were racist and from a different culture. Out here they think they can do the same thing. That's the way I look at it. But the other thing, a lot of people complain that people move here and take the jobs. I am not against that because everyone has a right to go wherever they think is best. And as long as they do the job right, well it is not their fault they are not qualified for that job. And it is not their fault that somebody else does not do the job right and they fired that person and replaced them with a Vietnamese or a Mexican or whatever. But only thing those people are bringing up is different cultures. And we got all kinds here.

GR: How do you think the cultures that you have spoken of interact in Holland?

RG: I think it is too late for that. If you're the old generation, you can work it out. But these little kids here, now, hear it from the big ones. For instance if you have three kids, the little one is going to be working with the other people or with himself in the same way as the old ones. And if the old one's good, maybe the next one will be good, or maybe he'll turn around and go different. It is hard to explain those things. When we first moved here, all grown up people had kids. The kids didn't mind the orders from their parents. You could tell someone else's kid "don't do that," and they would listen to you. You try that now.

GR: Can you tell what you have heard others say about Holland, such as your family or friends from out of town? What is their view of Holland outside of town?

RG: It is an easy thing to say. I think the people that like Holland already left and went somewhere else. And the people that are still here like Holland. So it is easy to tell (laughter).

GR: So, your friends and family from outside of Holland, what do they tell you about your town?

RG: In that I have enough experience, because I was working in almost five counties. Then we had a lot of meetings with Detroit and Lansing and all that. I think the people get along with the people from our side. But also, on that side, like Detroit, it depends on what neighborhood you go to. If you go to the right neighborhood, you get along with those people. They may not get along with you, but you get along with them (laughter), because you're already there. But it is very hard to describe that.

GR: Have you had positive or negative comments?

RG: No. No positives, but no negatives either. No matter where you go, you will have people who don't agree with the people who move next door. Or they don't agree that these people move away. I don't think they are too bad about that.

GR: That is the end of the interview with Ray Gutierrez.